

# The Macomb Daily

## Prescription program has saved Macomb seniors over \$1.7M

By Chad Selweski - Macomb Daily Staff Writer - Sunday, March 13, 2011

A county program that was launched with little notice five years ago has quietly saved Macomb's senior citizens more than \$1.7 million by providing free prescription drugs.

The Prescription Resource Network, based at the county Department of Senior Services, taps into the pharmaceutical company's efforts to assist low-income elderly. For those who qualify, most drug manufacturers provide their products free of charge.

But the research and paperwork involved can be daunting. Seniors who rely upon the PRN to steer their way through the red tape are often amazed at the results.

One Macomb Township couple has received more than \$114,000 in free medications. Another client, who was initially skeptical, has saved more than \$60,000 over the past three years.

"Some of these people are on 20 medications, and in most cases these are very expensive drugs," said Colleen Burns, the PRN program coordinator.

The Medicare Part D program that provides federal funds for seniors' drug purchases has clearly helped the elderly, but the Medicare assistance has its limits. Many seniors hit the so-called "donut hole" — the Part D cutoff after \$2,800 of benefits — in the early months of each year.

"The pharmaceutical companies are getting a lot more generous as they've seen how Medicare Part D actually works," Burns said. "The more expensive the drug — and if there is no generic equivalent — the more willing they are to provide help."

These goodwill efforts by the drug manufacturers have also expanded as the lagging economy has taken its toll on seniors' ability to afford medications.

One company's financial guidelines have been eased to the point where free prescriptions are available to those with an income within four times the federal poverty level. That means an income limit of about \$40,000 for single seniors.

PRN began as a nonprofit organization that was associated with local hospitals, but the program eventually ran into funding difficulties and the county took it over in 2006. Now, Burns is able to provide about \$40,000 a month in benefits.

For more information on the program, call (586) 469-6316.